This groundbreaking artwork has completely transformed Saturday nights in Providence, with tens of thousands of people flocking downtown for each lighting and the performances, music, and camaraderie that accompany it. It is hard to describe it in words, but it has been transformative. WaterFire really has fundamentally altered the way Providence is viewed and the way the people of Providence view themselves. Support from NEA is helping WaterFire further explore creative placemaking, and it is incredibly meaningful.

A final thought to share comes from Professor Touba Ghadessi, a board member for the Rhode Island Council on the Humanities. Professor Ghadessi was asked to share her thoughts on why NEH matters for all Rhode Islanders, and I truly cannot improve upon her words. This is what she had to say:

''The Rhode Island Council for the Humanities uncovers beautiful stories about individuals and places and brings them to life—these stories become our history and make us understand that we, too, write the narratives that construct culture. The intentionally diverse programming that RICH supports builds communities that, eventually, will view diversity as normalcy—this normalcy is the one I aspire to construct for the next generation. RICH allows for our best selves to come forward and celebrate together what culture teaches us—from the struggles of social justice, to the legacy of first peoples, to the craft of filmmaking for children. All of these things matter. All of these things make us better human beings. All of these things turn us into ethical and engaged citizens of the world. Without an understanding of the humanities, opinions become facts and truth is debatable. History has offered us a roadmap to behaving with integrity—we can't ignore it or ignorance wins.''

Mr. Speaker, I cannot think of more important words for these times, and I would ask all of my colleagues to reflect on what it will take to view diversity as normalcy and why it seems today that the truth is debatable.

Mr. Speaker, I thank all my colleagues for being here today. I am proud to share my thoughts on why it is so important that we not zero out the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities and the incredible impact they have on our communities.

I have one more story from my district about the impact of the arts and humanities that I'd like to share.

It, too, relates to the legacy of Senator Pell, but it also points to the broader cuts to arts and humanities in the President's budget outline.

A decade after the passage of the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities Act, Senator Pell was again at the forefront of cultural preservation and promotion when he sponsored legislation creating the Office of Museum Services.

While the Office was eventually rolled into the Institute of Museum and Library Services, it continues to support great work, which I saw firsthand last year in my district when the Tomaquaq Museum in Exeter was awarded the prestigious National Medal for Museum and Library Service.

Recently, we in Rhode Island have been celebrating the 350th anniversary of our charter and Roger Williams's respect for the Indigenous People he lived among.

But far too often, this story treats Rhode Island's tribes as bit players rather than delving into their rich culture and history.

The Tomaquag Museum's founders recognized this flaw in the narrative in the 1950s, and while I'm disappointed it took the rest of us so long to catch up, I'm incredibly proud of all the recognition it's received of late.

The Tomaquag Museum remains the only Rhode Island institution dedicated solely to the history and culture of the state's indigenous population, and I have experienced its power to start conversations and change attitudes in our communities.

Unfortunately, IMLS, too, is slated for defending under the President's budget outline.

We are very lucky that my home state Senator, JACK REED, has taken up Senator Pell's mantle in pushing for its reauthorization and full funding.

But it is important that all of my colleagues join together to protect the NEA, the NEH, IMLS, and support for the arts and humanities throughout the federal budget.

We must do so because of the lives touched and forever altered by these organizations.

We must do so in order to achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future.

We must do so because it is good policy.

I hope that hearing the stories shared today has helped cement that fact in the minds of my colleagues, and I look forward to working with them to continue to promote the arts and humanities.

With that, I again thank all my colleagues who joined me this morning.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

REMEMBERING WORLD WAR I

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. RUSSELL) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. RUSSELL. Mr. Speaker, today, exactly 100 years ago, on this very floor, the United States declared war on Imperial Germany and entered the First World War on the side of the Allies. The decisions that led to that monumental declaration forever changed America's destiny, economy, military, foreign policy, and culture.

Today also marks the beginning of our National Centennial remembrance of America's service in World War I for the sacrifices made by all Americans and for the more than one-quarter of a million American casualties, including over 100,000 dead, most of whom were lost in a mere 6-month period from May to November 1918.

By the war's end, my great-grandfather and his three brothers would all serve. My great-grandfather's brother, my great-uncle, Frank Chamberlain, was killed in action. This is his pipe that he was carrying when he was killed in France, his dog tags, and his uniform insignia that I was able to inherit from my great-grandfather.

He lays peacefully in France under a white marble military gravestone, a scant, faceless hint of the man who was once filled with laughter and humor, who held dreams, hopes, and goals for the future. Frank was 19 years old.

On April 6, 1917, our country was forever changed, and it began right here on this very floor. It is only fitting, Mr. Speaker, that we give remembrance to its beginning here today. I am indeed indebted to the fine work of Dr. Eric B. Setzekorn of the United States Army's Center of Military History for his material from ''Joining the Great War,'' which forms the basis for today's remembrance.

After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria on the 28th of June 1914, which led to the military mobilization across Europe and declarations of war by early August, most Americans took solace that the Atlantic Ocean shielded the United States from the conflict. The Chicago Herald summed up the popular support for isolation from Europe's strife in its article that said: ''Peace-loving citizens of this country will now rise up and tender a hearty vote of thanks to Columbus for having discovered America.''

Germany's invasion of neutral Belgium brought Great Britain into the war and divided Europe into two great camps. Britain joined France and Russia to form the Triple Entente, more commonly referred to as the Allied Powers. Opposed to them were Germany and Austria-Hungary, making up the Central Powers.

President Woodrow Wilson believed that the immoral nature of European politics created entangling alliances that transformed a regional conflict into a global war that threatened world peace. The President delivered a Declaration of Neutrality to this very Congress on the 19th of August 1914, calling on all citizens to remain ''impartial in thought, as well as in action.'' However, between late 1914 and early 1917, the escalating conflict tested American traditions of isolationism as it threatened to draw the Nation closer to the war.

The initial German offensive against France ended in September at the Battle of the Marne, after which both sides attempted a series of flanking maneuvers to gain the advantage. Neither side proved capable of overcoming the killing power that machine guns and rapid-firing artillery brought to the defensive, and the battle lines all along the Western Front stabilized in a vast system of trenches stretching from Switzerland all the way to the English Channel. This was a new type of warfare, with soldiers subjected to prolonged stress and danger, with little chance for daring heroics or martial glory.

Behind the trenches, the development of sophisticated supply systems that were able to support millions of men and massive levels of firepower and the ability to rush reserves to block any potential enemy breakthrough led to a vicious stalemate.

On the broad expanses of the Eastern Front, Germany and Austria were locked in a brutal war of attrition with Russia, where logistics and artillery shells counted far more than bravery.

To break through the deadlock, the combatants attempted to smash through enemy

lines with ever larger offensives. Attacks in 1915 saw tens of thousands of soldiers and hundreds of artillery pieces deployed along only a few miles of the front, trying to win through sheer weight of numbers and ordnance. The result was thousands of dead and gains measured in yards after weeks of constant fighting.

Poison gas, first used by the Germans in April 1915 and later adopted by every nation, added to the daily misery and danger. By 1916, as the industrial economies of Germany, France, and Britain became fully geared toward war production, battles increased in scale and destructiveness. In the fight of the fortress of Verdun between February and December, the French and Germans suffered more than 1 million casualties combined.

On the first day of the Somme Offensive on the 1st of July 1916, the British and French fired more than 2 million artillery shells into the German lines in support of 19 divisions attacking along only a 20-mile front. Despite this colossal weight of numbers, the British alone suffered 57,000 casualties on the very first day and did not break the German defenses. By the time the Somme ended in mid-November, all sides had suffered more than a combined 1 million casualties, while the front moved fewer than 10 miles. As a result, Verdun and the Somme became synonymous with the slaughter and destruction that defined the Western Front.

As the stalemate in France continued, U.S. political and public opinion began to shift from neutrality toward support for the Allies. German atrocities in Belgium, at times exaggerated by Allied propaganda, shocked many Americans. Additionally, in early 1915, the Germans began an effort to isolate the British Isles by using submarines, known as Unterseeboote, or U-boats, to attack British merchant shipping.

□ 1215

The German campaign, which consisted of the unrestricted sinking of any merchant vessel bound for Britain, was portrayed by American newspapers as a cowardly and immoral method of warfare.

On the 1st of May 1915, a German U-boat sank the British liner RMS *Lusitania*, killing 1,198 men, women, and children, including 128 American citizens onboard. After the attack, The New York Times called on President Wilson to ''demand that the Germans shall no longer make war like savages drunk with blood.''

Fearing that such action could pull the United States into the war, and concerned over British violations of American shipping rights, President Wilson continued his policy of neutrality. Seeking to take the moral high road, he proclaimed: ''There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight . . . There is such a thing as a Nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right.''

However, after the Germans sank the French passenger ferry SS *Sussex* in March 1916, Wilson threatened to break off diplomatic relations with Germany. In May, the Germans pledged to abandon unrestricted submarine warfare, though they reserved the right to attack legitimate targets such as armed merchant ships or those vessels carrying war materiel.

As Germany's submarine campaign damaged its relations with the United States, America's economic relationship with Britain and France expanded. Faced with a war of attrition, the Allies relied on agricultural and industrial resources to support their war efforts.

Despite a British blockade that severely cut American commerce and its friendly relations to the former central powers, U.S. trade with Europe more than doubled from 1913 to 1917. U.S. companies not only provided civilian goods, but also war materiel. Bethlehem Steel alone supplied the Allies with over 20 million artillery shells between 1914 and 1918, while major weapons manufacturers like Remington and Winchester sold rifles and guns. Allied governments relied heavily on the U.S. banking industry for billions in loans to finance their war.

Despite the United States' growing economic ties to the Allies, the American public still preferred that the Nation remain neutral. The British Government's brutal suppression of the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland angered many Americans—and certainly, Irish Americans—as did its continued violation of American neutral shipping rights through its blockade of Germany.

As the casualty list grew during 1916, most Americans were thankful that they had not been drawn into the carnage engulfing Europe.

In November 1916, President Wilson won reelection by a narrow margin, largely on the slogan, ''He kept us out of war.'' However, circumstances changed rapidly in early 1917. Many Americans began to volunteer for the French, great Britain or Canada, like my Uncle Frank.

Germany's increasingly desperate strategic situation led to a resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare on the 31st of January 1917. This action broke the earlier pledge of the Germans to respect passenger shipping and convinced President Wilson to break diplomatic relations with Germany on the 3rd of February 1917.

Soon after, the British Government provided Wilson an intercepted communication from the German foreign secretary, Arthur Zimmermann, to the German envoy in Mexico. In the telegram, Zimmermann proposed that if the United States joined the war on the Allied side, Germany and Mexico should enter into an alliance. In return, Mexico, by taking up arms against the United States, would receive from Germany supplies, financial assistance. Once a victory was achieved, Mexico could claim territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

The State Department released the telegram to the Associated Press on the 28th of February, and the American public opinion turned sharply, as many became convinced of German duplicity and aggressive intentions. No longer was the war seen as simply a horrific folly by the European powers, but rather as a clear indication of the danger of unchecked militarism.

With the abdication of the Russian czar in February 1917 and the rise of a provisional representative government, Americans came to see the war as a struggle that pitted democracies against aggressive, authoritarian imperialists.

Faced with this clear contrast, President Wilson addressed this very floor on April 2, 1917, in a joint session of Congress declaring his desire that: We shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.

On the 6th of April—100 years ago today, where I am standing—with concrete evidence of German hostility to the United States, to international peace, and to liberal democracy, Congress of the United States declared war on Germany.

The first act of war committed on Germany was executed that very day, when the United States Army's 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry marched from Fort Jay, New York, to Hoboken, New Jersey, boarded and seized the German ships in the harbor and interned the German crews. I had the privilege to command the 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry in Iraq in 2003–2004.

Among the ships seized that day on April 6, 1917, was the SS *Vaterland*, a luxury liner later renamed the USS *Leviathan*. This luxury transport would send 10 percent of all doughboys to France and bring a great many of them home as well.

The last American World War I veteran was Frank Buckles, who enlisted from Oakwood, Oklahoma, in August of 1917. He died only 6 years ago, in February 2011, at age 110.

I had the privilege to know a great many World War I veterans. The last time I saw my great-grandfather was when I came home on leave as a young Army captain. As we had a very pleasant visit and it came to a close and I had to go, he told me: ''Don't go yet. I want to give you something.''

He returned from his bedroom with some items in a cigar box that I remember looking at as a kid. He said: ''I want you to have these.''

I said: ''I can't take these, grandpa. Those were your brother's.''

He said: ''You will take them because I know you will keep Frank's memory alive.''

He was right. They have been displayed by me ever since, wherever I have been.

As we reflect today on the declaration of war 100 years ago on this very spot in 1917 that began the United States entry into World War I, let us embark on a national centennial remembrance for all Americans of that day who sacrificed so much for our Republic. They are all gone now, but as long as we who knew them have breath and remember them, they will live.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

BRIDGES ACADEMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) for 30 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, last weekend I had the pleasure of visiting Bridges Academy, a charter school in State Road, North Carolina. The school was celebrating the decision by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction unanimously to renew its charter for an additional 10 years.

Bridges Academy opened in 1997 as one of the first charter schools in North Carolina. Established by a local community group, it is overseen by a grassroots, local board of directors. It serves a rural population from surrounding systems in Alleghany, Surry, Wilkes, and Yadkin counties, and Elkin city.